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FROM AMBASSADOR KOROLOGOS FOR THE SECRETARY

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR THE SECRETARY'S JANUARY 26, 2007
MEETING WITH BELGIAN FM DE GUCHT

Classified By: Ambassador Tom C. Korologos, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: We expect Belgian FM De Gucht to have three major subjects on his mind when he meets the Secretary in Brussels on January 26 -- Kosovo, Iran, and Russia. You will have worked over Kosovo at the lunch, but you can usefully reinforce next steps with the Belgians during your discussion. De Gucht also may raise two narrow issues, a request that the U.S. review its opposition to creation of a formal mechanism in Congo through which the major external players can convey a unified position to the new government, and a suggestion that the U.S. and Belgium "swap" the month they serve as Security Council president in New York. End Summary

Kosovo

¶2. (C) Belgian FM De Gucht recently expressed very positive support for UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari's plans for concluding the Kosovo process. De Gucht specifically excluded Belgium from the category of countries that believe full independence for Kosovo will have a negative internal domestic impact. De Gucht noted it was difficult to comment fully without having seen the proposal, but said "seminal we are going to be for Ahtisaari's plans." That said, De Gucht told Congressman Wexler during his January 15 visit to Brussels the OSCE does not like "dictated borders," adding that Kosovo would generate much consultation within the EU.

¶3. (C) Although De Gucht is the best gauge of Belgium's position, we note his "Kosovo experts" are less strong in their support. The MFA's Director for the Balkans recently indicated that while Belgium "supports Ahtisaari's efforts," there is concern about "forcing" a specific timeline and about what an independent Kosovo might do to regional stability. He also thought Ahtisaari should wait "a reasonable time" to present his proposal to the parties after the installation of a Serb government, although he did express strong support for KFOR.

Iran

¶4. (C) The Belgians have maintained a "no waffling" stance on this issue, a point De Gucht made to Bob Kimmitt during a long session on January 23. They have made clear to us, in the EU, and directly to the Iranians that their sanctions policy is tougher than the requirements of UNSC 1737. De Gucht will want to reinforce this point with you, especially as they are chair of the new UNSC Iran Sanctions Committee.

He will personally ensure that Belgium's complicated government machinery works in unison on this issue. Apart from any comments he makes during the transatlantic lunch, he has a keen interest in where we see relations with Iran developing over the next few months, particularly in the Security Council. You should expect queries on how the Chinese and Russians are approaching this issue. He also may convey a sentiment he often expresses to us -- "you can count on Belgium, but please keep us in the loop, particularly if you are planning any sharp changes in policy."

Russia

¶5. (C) At the end of his year as Chairman in Office of the OSCE, De Gucht let slip a sharply critical comment about how the Russians had trifled with him and the OSCE during endless rounds of discussions. We think this remark offered an accurate picture of his sense of exasperation about Russian behavior toward the west. In addition to the Russian attitude toward such OSCE-type issues as Belarus, Moldova, and Georgia, De Gucht also is very concerned about energy security. The recent brief cutoff of petroleum supplies to Belarus highlighted Belgium's high degree of vulnerability on that score -- Belgium receives about one-third of its petroleum through the pipeline from Russia. (The Belgians are far less vulnerable on natural gas.)

¶6. (C) As with Iran, De Gucht will want to highlight his personal determination to hold a tough line, even if Belgium occasionally takes a tactically softer position to stay within any EU consensus, or in keeping with the cautious line pushed by some "make a deal at any cost" officials in the MFA. It would be useful for you to mention your February 2005 conversation with him about the need for standing firm,

and to outline where you see our policy headed. We believe he will work toward common goals during Belgium's tour in the UNSC.

Congo

¶7. (C) This remains an issue of pre-eminent concern with the Belgians. They are nervously watching post-election developments, and are hypersensitive to any chance that violence or disorder might derail some of the initiatives they have planned for smoothing the way of the elected government. (These actions include a possible visit to Congo by the King and Queen.) One manifestation of Belgian nervousness is their insistent suggestion that like-minded ambassadors based in Kinshasa, and the local representatives of the UN, World Bank, and IMF establish a formal mechanism for consulting among themselves and for delivering messages to President Kabila. Various USG representatives have tried to deep six this idea, including most recently at a January 22 Great Lakes Contact Group meeting in The Hague, where there reportedly was little support for the idea. Despite this the MFA's Africa Department has told us that they have asked De Gucht to raise the matter with you.

UNSC Presidency Swap

¶8. (U) We hear the Belgians may propose asking us to swap their UNSC Presidency month with us, as their elections fall at the same time as their presidency. If De Gucht raises it, we suggest you say "The Council's rules of procedure set out the order for serving as President; we note there has never before been a deviation to the agreed order, and any change would need Council consensus. If other members all agreed, we would not oppose such an arrangement." Korologos

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